

Does Māori Representation Matter?: Māori Substantive Political Representation in Practice.

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This paper explores whether elected Māori MPs and councillors represent Māori interests. Electoral reforms were made to central government in 1996 and local government in 2001-02, in part, to achieve greater Māori descriptive representation. Yet there is little evidence illustrating how the presence of Māori representatives facilitates the substantive representation of Māori interests. Does diversity in identity breed diversity of interests? Are Māori representing Māori? If not, who do they 'act for'? The main goal of this paper is to examine why and how Māori identity influences Māori representatives' views on their political role and how they conceive of representation in both central and local government. Set within a politics of presence framework, the paper addresses whether the presence of elected Māori representatives in parliament and local councils is likely to facilitate and improve the level of representation of Māori concerns.

Results from in-depth interviews with 15 current Māori MPs and 20 Māori local body councillors will be presented. Key themes drawn from these interviews will be discussed which broadly relate to the Māori representative role, symbolic representation, surrogate representation, the distinct political style of Māori representatives, and the obstacles interviewees identified as most significantly impacting on their role. The major themes drawn from interviews with Māori MPs will then be further illustrated using three case studies – the Foreshore and Seabed Act 2004, the Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi Deletion Bill (debated in 2006-07), and the Whenuakite land claim issue which arose in 2007.